TWO ANNUNCIATIONS: EXAMPLES OF INTERPELLATION OR OFFERS OF RECEPTION? A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PICTURES BY ROGER VAN DER WEYDEN AND RENÉ MAGRITTE

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This thesis uses reception theory, as formulated by the late Wolfgang Iser, as well as ideas about interpellation or hailing, to compare and analyze two paintings: *The Annunciation* (c. 1435) by Roger van der Weyden and *Personal Values* (1952) by René Magritte. It demonstrates that interpellation and reception are part of the same process, and that reception theory is especially suited to this comparison and analysis—because it allows consideration of ways in which the comparable pictorial structures of both paintings facilitate their intentions. It argues that those intentions are to engage viewers in a dialogue that ultimately is beneficial to both pictures and viewers. Furthermore, based on this shared intent, and on visible structural similarities, it argues that each of the two paintings identifies and receives the other as a picture of the same image—that is, of the Annunciation.

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And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail! thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women! And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

Luke 1:28 and 29, King James Version

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Found in the Gospel of Luke, the Biblical account of the Annunciation, is a delicately literal instance of interpellation or hailing—one that Christopher Pye has called the "ur-instance of subjective interpellation in Western culture."[1] Visually it has been translated on countless occasions into pictures that, in their turn, hail the individuals who pass before them. How can reception theory be used to analyze such literal instances of interpellation? How can such analysis find similar instances of interpellation in other genres of pictures? What are the relationships between interpellation and reception? What might reception theory reveal about pictures that less literally instantiate interpellation? Do such pictures have intentions about, or anticipations of, response or reception that exceed the intentions of the artists who made them? If so, how are such intentions implemented? How are the above-noted instances of interpellation addressed within the context of Althusserian theories about power relations? Within what other theories of hailing can they be considered?

This project focuses on two paintings, whose analysis responds to the questions raised above and anticipates yet others. One of the pictures is a traditional, visual representation of Luke's account in the New Testament: Roger

[1] Christopher Pye, "The Vanishing", Early Modern Literary Studies 8.2 (September 2002):14. http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/emls/08-2/anderev.html

van der Weyden's *Annunciation* (c. 1435), in the collection of the Louvre. The other is René Magritte's *Personal Values* (1952), in the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The van der Weyden is an oil on oak panel, measuring approximately 34-by-36.5 inches; the Magritte is an oil on canvas, measuring 31.5-by-39.5 inches. Each depicts a dimly lit domestic room that contains a bed and a storage cabinet, among other furnishings. It is a selection that pairs picturing a literal act of hailing and identification of an ideal subject/receptacle, with a painting that has some similar content—and, I will argue, a kindred metaphorical content and a comparable pictorial intention.

I have seen both pictures in person, at the Louvre and in San Francisco. Sufficient years have passed since either viewing, however, that this discussion is based on a brew of unreliable memories, and on the pictures' visual and textual reproduction in print and electronic form—leaving me in the peculiar position of writing about direct experience, based for the most part on indirect experiences.

But, as Michael Ann Holly has written: "The loop, or game, of looking and reading and writing is endless."[2] Therefore, in spite of the passage of time and the endless looping of ideas, I have developed a thesis in respect to the two pictures. I will argue that:

- The *Annunciation* and *Personal Values* similarly intend to interpellate the viewer, in order to engage the viewer in an intersubjective relationship.

[2] Michael Ann Holly, *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 171.

- The intersubjective relationship between each picture and its viewer is intended to stimulate a renewal of the picture and an intensified and beneficial consciousness of selfhood in the viewer.
- The intentions of both pictures are implemented through their similar visual structures and treatment of content, by which I mean architectural references and such objects as pieces of furniture and human figures.
- Successful demonstration of the points noted above allows me to posit that Magritte's picture is a covert Annunciation in the early Netherlandish tradition of overt Annunciations, as exemplified by the van der Weyden. In other words, the van der Weyden and the Magritte both are pictures of the same image.[3]

The primary means by which I will demonstrate my thesis is by describing and analyzing the structure and content of the above two pictures in accordance with Wolfgang Iser's writings on reader response and, to a lesser extent, his writings on the fictive. Iser (22 July 1926-24 January 2007) held the title of Emeritus Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine, and at the University of Constance.[4] He was a student of Hans-Georg Gadamer at the University of Heidelberg and briefly was Gadamer's colleague there, after receiving his PhD in 1950.[5] I emphasize Iser's relationship

[3] See Hans Belting's "Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology" *Critical Inquiry*, 31, no. 2 (winter 2005); and W.J.T. Mitchell, What *do pictures want? The lives and loves of images* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 83. Mitchell writes: "The picture is the image plus the support; it is the appearance of the immaterial image in a material medium."

[4] William St. Clair, obituary for Wolfgang Iser in *The Independent*, 2 February 2007. http://news.independent.co.uk/people/obituaries/article2245106.ece

[5] http://dbpedia/org/page/person/Wolfgang_Iser

with Gadamer, because the older scholar, who taught hermeneutics, had an abiding influence on Iser. Roman Ingarden's theories of phenomenology also exerted a direct influence on Iser,[6] who understood that phenomenological experience of a text included both the text, itself and the reader's active response to the text.[7] Thus, it is Iser's contention that "meanings in literary texts are generated in the act of reading; they are the product of a complex interaction between text and reader … ."[8] Although Iser's argument is stated in terms of "text" and "reader", I will apply it to "picture" and "viewer", as well, in order to establish the nucleus of my thesis.

I am employing reception theory—also referred to as "reader response" and "response theory"—instead of reception history because, as indicated above, reception theory is concerned with the roles of both text and reader. Reception history, however, "substitutes the reader's experience for the authority of either the text or its author'—as that experience changes for various readers over the course of time.[9]

Furthermore, I am employing Iser's ideas, rather than those of other reader-response theorists, because so many of Iser's peers also deny or diminish the role of text and/or author. Iser, however, establishes an inclusive middle-ground that takes both conception and reception into account and, therefore, strikes me as practical and reasonable. Yet another, and personal,

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[6] David Albertson, "Stanford prelecture" introduction to Wolfgang Iser, 2000. http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/iser/

[7] Jane Tompkins, *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 50.

[8] Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 5.

[9] Holly, 198.

reason for choosing Iser is that this thesis stems from my being hailed by his ideas as much as I was hailed by the visual structuring of the above-noted pictures—as well as by other Early Netherlandish pictures and other works by Magritte. Individually and in tandem, those pictures interpellated me, and Iser's ideas announced themselves to me as a means of making sense of those pictorial interpellations.

To accomplish that, I am emphasizing theoretical over historical research in my methodology, because it allows me to focus on the individual and intersubjective dynamics of two specific pictures; and because I presently am not in a situation where I can undertake primary research into either Early Netherlandish devotional paintings or Magritte's work.

Of Iser's writings translated into English, I have consulted these four, which present the full scope of his complex ideas about reader/text interaction: *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyon to Beckett* (1974); *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978); *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (1989); and *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (1993). I have not read his final book, published in 2006,[10] as it was not available at the time I was analyzing the potential relationship of Iserian theory to the pictures concerned. As of his 1993 text, however, Iser's study of reader response leads him to a conclusion: "Art appears to be indispensable, because it is a means of human

[10] Wolfgang Iser, *How to Do Theory (How to Study Literature)* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

self-exegesis."[11] For Iser, art permits an expanded consciousness of the self's position in what he calls the "empirical world".[12]

But, if Iser's main point of reference is the literary text, his above, generic reference to "art" and to the "fictive", suggest that his ideas can be applied directly to a variety of texts. Further reference to the relevance of Iser's ideas to visual art is found in Holly's essay, "Reading Critical Theory". Holly has quoted Iser in relation to her own application of reader response theory: "The emergent meaning, even though Iser operates exclusively with literary examples, must be grasped 'as an image. The image provides the filling for what the textual pattern structures but leaves out.' "[13]

Wolfgang Kemp and Erdman Waniek, among others, have perceived the relevance of the reception paradigm to analysis of visual texts. Citing Gadamer, Waniek, has written that "regardless of physiological differences in the processing of verbal or pictorial cues, from a certain point on, the logic governing the reading process of a painting is that same as that governing the reading of a text."[14]

While reception theory has come to be recognized as a tool for visual analysis, Iser's ideas remain underutilized, however, due to his problematic status as a theorist and to the inclusiveness of his ideas—which even Holly

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[11] Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), xiii.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Holly, 202-203.

[14] Erdmann Waniek, "Looking and Reading: In Search of a *Tertium Comparationis*", *Bucknell Review: Theories of Reading, Looking and Listening* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1981), 134.

concedes.[15] Iser's reputation in American scholarly circles has been based on two stages of recognition of his research and writings. The first stage involved Iser's and Hans-Robert Jauss' development of reader-response theory at the University of Constance. What became known as the Constance School of reception theory had its counterpart in the writings of David Bleich, Stanley Fish, and other American academics. Although Jauss and Iser initially were accepted by their American peers, both eventually were marginalized in the United States—Jauss, perhaps due to revelations about his involvement with the Waffen-SS; and Iser, largely due to a harsh essay by Fish in the spring, 1981 issue of *Diacritics*.[16]

The name of Fish's article was "Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser" and, in it, Fish claimed that's Iser's theory was "finally nothing more than a loosely constructed network of pasted-together contradictions; push it hard at any point, and it immediately falls apart."[17] Fish concluded that it "is in fact not a theory at all, but a piece of literature … full of gaps and the reader is invited to fill them in his own way."[18] Unfortunately, Iser failed to produce a strong counter-argument to Fish's claims.

Peter Uwe Hohendahl has suggested that the reason Fish attacked Iser was that Iser had failed to make a clean break with traditional hermeneutics—a break that would be required by American academics of the time, including Fish,

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[15] Holly, 204-205.

[16] These arguments were put forth by Peter Uwe Hohendahl in "Brain Drain and Transfer of Knowledge", *Whose Brain Drain: Immigrant Scholars and American Views of Germany*, Harry and Helen Gray Humanities Series, vol. 9 (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 8-9.

[17] Stanley Fish, "Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser", *Diacritics* 11 no. 1 (spring 1981: 13.

[18] Ibid.

who were intent upon radical revision of literary studies.[19] In other words, Iser had not denounced Gadamer's theories of textual interpretation, but had built upon them.

Whatever Fish's motives, his essay damaged Iser's credibility in American academia to such an extent that, in 2004, an anthology devoted to Fish's career included Michael Bérubé's essay, "There is Nothing Inside the Text, or, Why No One's Heard of Wolfgang Iser". According to Bérubé: " … by 1990, reader-response had fallen off the Major Theoretical Positions chart" and "poor Iser had disappeared so completely that some worried theorists of reading wondered if he would ever be seen again save on milk cartons."[20]

Iser's disappearance from or, less exaggeratedly, his marginalization in American academic critical discourse is acknowledged by Holly in her essay "Reading Critical Theory".[21] The overall thesis of Holly's book, *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image,* for which the essay serves as a concluding chapter, is that the visual structure of certain historical works of art anticipate and influence how they are going to be received and interpreted, and that Iser's theory of reader response, combined with other elements of the reception paradigm, comes closest to what she wants to say "about the afterlife of Renaissance and baroque art".[22]

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[19] Hohendahl, 10.

[20] Michael Bérubé, "There is Nothing Inside the Text, or, Why No One's Heard of Wolfgang Iser", *Postmodern Sophistry: Stanley Fish and the Critical Enterprise*, ed. Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 15.

[21] Holly, 205-206.

[22] Holly, 172.

If, at the same time, Holly concurs with Fish's critique,[23] she also has cited Iser's identification of the central question that reception theory answers: that of "how it happens that a literary text born under the conditions of a specific historial situation can outlast that situation and maintain its freshness and its impact on different historical circumstances."[24]

In addition, Holly has interpreted Iser to mean that the intention of the text eclipses the intent of its author. According to Holly: "The meaning that a work accrues through time will always exceed its originating rhetoric. … reference to the author's intention (although one would not at first suspect so from Iser's wording) is subtly eclipsed by the passage of the broader cloud of textuality."[25]

Grateful as I am to Holly for her qualified vindication of Iser, I also am grateful to Fish—for so clearly articulating my reasons for choosing a problematic touchstone for my analysis of the van der Weyden and Magritte paintings. To wit: Iser's writing "is full of gaps and the reader is invited to fill them in his own way."

Iser's colleague Gabriele Schwab also has reinforced my choice, in her reception of Iser's gaps and contradictions. She has written: "As if by osmosis, his theories resonate with what they attempt to show … . We may then read Iser according to his own theory, filling in the gaps and endowing his patterns of thought with historical, cultural and personal concretion … ."[26]

Thus, both Fish and Schwab have described the methodology I intend to use in my analysis of van der Weyden's *Annunciation* and Magritte's *Personal*

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[23] Holly, 205.
[24] Holly, 195.
[25] Holly, 206-207.
[26] Gabriele Schwab, "If only I were not obliged to manifest", *New Literary History*, 31 no. 1 (spring 2000): 83-84.

Values. For, as noted above, I was hailed by those pictures and was interpellated by Iser's theories. Thus, I gratefully accept the indeterminacies in his ideas, and use them to analyze the indeterminacies and the unique intersubjective relationship of the van der Weyden and the Magritte, and of my engagement with them as individual pictures, and as a pair of comparable pictures. I also will employ—as additional material with which to fill the gaps in Iser's texts and in the two pictorial texts—writings on critical theory by Hans Belting, Norman Bryson, and Margaret Olin, among others.

Additional sources for my research include Anne Hollander's book, *Moving Pictures* (1989) and Lisa K. Lipinski's dissertation, "René Magritte and Simulation: Effects Beyond His Wildest Dreams" (2000). In writing about the abundant detail in Early Netherlandish pictures, Hollander has referred to "naked" representations of discrete that "force a relation to *us*, not to each other".[27] For her part, Lipinski has written that Magritte's pictures affect the viewer[28] through pictorial compositions that encourage viewers to "embrace the paradoxical. Inhabit the gray areas."[29] These examples of analysis do not directly cite response theory, but each echoes Iser's ideas about ways in which texts hail viewers and engage them in intersubjective processes of creating meaning. They also imply that such instances of interpellation are liberating, rather than

[27] Anne Hollander, *Moving Pictures* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 17.
[28] Lisa K. Lipinski, "René Magritte and Simulation: Effects Beyond His Wildest Dreams", dissertation (University of Texas-Austin, 2000), 177.
[29] Ibid, 314.

oppressive, and might even subvert the sort of dominant discourses that Louis Althusser addressed in his writings on ideology and hegemony.[30]

Furthermore, James Marrow has combined historical research with critical theory to describe the structural and figural programming of Early Netherlandish devotional paintings in relation to their reception. He has written eloquently about the intention of Jan van Eyck and the Boucicaut Master, among others, to go beyond inspiring pious viewer empathy towards the depicted subject and to "proclaim that the viewer must engage works of art in terms that implicate him experientially, not just conceptually, in the world of the image and its meaning … ."[31] Tentatively identifying van Eyck with the artist known as Hand G, Marrow further has described certain pictures' potential to lead viewers to "a new type of interaction with the images, one that invites them to supply what is not seen from their own knowledge of the inhabited world."[32] These ideas strongly relate to Iser's arguments about the way in which text-based fiction not only allows the viewer to be aware of the artifice of pictorial texts, but also will draw the viewer into what Marrow has called a "lived experience of the subjects".[33]

Iser's colleague Schwab expands upon this possibility, writing that "in processing literature we must actually engage in undoing and remaking

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[30] See Jennifer B. Gray, "Althusser, Ideology, and Theoretical Foundations: Theory and Communication", *Journal of New Media and Culture* 3 no. 1 (2005). http://www.ibiblio.org/nmediac/winter2004/gray.html

[31] James H. Marrow, "Symbolism and meaning in northern European art of the late middle ages and early Renaissance", *Simiolus* 16 no. 2/3 (1986): 163-164.

[32] Marrow, "History, Historiography, and Pictorial Invention in the Turin-Milan Hours", *In Detail: new Studies of Northern Renaissance Art in Honor of Walter D. Gibson* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 8.

[33] Marrow (1998), 11.

ourselves, including our cultural formations."[34] Iser perceived this undoing and remaking, which comes through play and the fusion of horizons of text and readers, as beneficial to the reader because it permits readers to cross boundaries of identity. Engaging in play with the text is a form of experience through which we "open ourselves up to the unfamiliar and are prepared to let our values be influenced or even changed by it."[35]

Iser's references also speak indirectly to Lipinski's assertion that Magritte wanted to "restore intensity to the mental universe and, by implication, reduce the isolation felt by humans."[36] Lipinski's insight suggests a secular mirroring of a main tenet of the Christian faith—that God, as announced in Luke's narrative, came into the world to relieve humanity's awareness of its own spiritual isolation.

Admittedly, Althusser might have accommodated the possibility that Magritte sought to effect a secular reawakening, but the Church's long history of political and religious oppression probably would have prompted him to receive van der Weyden's *Annunciation* as another example of recruitment to participate in a form of oppressive hegemony or ideology.[37] The scope of this project permits neither a comprehensive apologia for Christianity, nor a thorough refutation of Marxist critiques of institutionalized religion—not that either is possible, even given adequate space. That said, some historical research suggests that van der Weyden's picture could have exhibited a degree of resistance to Roman Catholic

[34] Schwab, 78.
[35] Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 259.
[36] Lipinski, 133-134.
[37] Gray on Althusser.

ideology.[38] Too, research by Lipinski and other Magritte scholars allows me to construe, as well, a quasi-spiritual dimension in Magritte's activities as a painter. However, neither of these readings can be supported conclusively. Thus, I will trust my own reception of the various texts at hand—realizing, in doing so, that I am participating in what could be construed as hegemonic ideology.

This introduction concludes with definitions of some of Iser's key ideas, as they will be employed in Chapter II's analysis of the *Annunciation* and of *Personal Values*. The ideas addressed in those definitions are:

Situatedness: Both text and viewer are located or situated within their own times and places, or horizons. Yet there are sufficient points of mutual familiarity on those horizons that interpellation and the interaction of subjectivities can take place. This idea of situatedness traces back to Iser's teacher, Gadamer, and to Gadamer's analysis of Martin Heidegger's writings.[39]

Site of play: The interaction or play of subjectivities (of text and reader) takes place in a "virtual space" that lies between the situations of text and reader.[40]

Preconception: Iser has written that "we cannot perceive without preconception".[41] In other words, the preconceptions obtaining from one's unique experiences and situatedness permit one to receive the text and generate meaning for it.

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[38] Craig Harbison, "Visions and mediations in Early Flemish painting", *Simiolus* 15 no. 2 (1985): 89.

[39] Jeff Malpas, "Hans Georg Gadamer", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* online (last revised, 2005), section 2.2 http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gadamer/

[40] Albertson in Iser pre-lecture.

[41] Iser (1989), 32.

Fusion of horizons: It is through the interaction of viewer and text that each reader's preconceptions are modified and the meaning of the texts is produced anew by each reader.[42] Thus, the horizons of viewer and text are fused, the situatedness of the text merges with the situatedness of the reader. The intersubjective process of hailing, recognition, and eventual fusion provides the answer to Iser's compelling question, cited in Chapter I, about how a text "born under the conditions of a specific historical situation can outlast that situation and maintain its freshness and its impact in different historical circumstances."[43]

Play: Although Iser has referred to this idea also in terms of intersubjectivity, as well as a to-and-fro exchange, he ultimately uses the term "play" to answer the question of "what actually does take place between text and reader?"[44] There is no end to the play, either, because play "is also itself changed by what it has set in motion; as a result, in the text game the play-forms themselves switch kaleidoscopically between what they are and what is eclipsed by their being."[45]

Indeterminacy: According to Iser: "Indeterminacy is the fundamental precondition for reader participation" because it stimulates play between text and reader.[46] Texts are indeterminate or uncertain, primarily due to gaps, but also because they do not conform entirely with the objects of the external world and

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[42] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2004), 350.
[43] Iser (1989), 228.
[44] Ibid, 3.
[45] Iser (1993), xviii.
[46] Iser (1989), 10.

with the experiences of the reader. Additionally, certain elements of the text may not conform with other elements of the text.[47]

Gaps: Gaps exist around the elements that an author structures into a text. That each element effectively creates several gaps, helps explain Iser's contention that the more precision within a text—that is, the more details or elements—the more gaps.[48] Gaps invite reader response by stimulating play and inviting the reader to bridge or rill in gaps in his or her own ways.[49]

Intentionality: According to Iser, discovery of a text's intention "lies not in the study of the author's life, dreams, and beliefs but in those manifestations of intentionality expressed in the fictional text itself … ."[50] Manifestations of intentionality are the structured elements of a text, which are outnumbered by the constantly shifting gaps surrounding those elements—and by readers continually bridging those gaps through production of meaning. Thus the text obtains a life of its own.

The fictive: From Iser's perspective, the reader is aware of the fictiveness or artifice of the text, but accepts it as if it were true.[51] This duality allows the reader to cross boundaries of situatedness, to keep in view "what has been overstepped. As a result, the fictive simultaneously disrupts and doubles the referential world."[52]

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[47] Iser (1989), 7.
[48] Iser (1989), 9.
[49] Iser (1983), 9.
[50] Iser (1993), 6.
[51] Iser (1993), 16.
[52] Iser (1993), xv.

As if: The fictive world of the text “becomes a medium for revealing what has remained concealed in the empirical world, and whatever may be the relation between the two, it is the ‘As If’ world that brings about the interplay between them.”[53] Thus the “as if”, the recognized fictionality of the text, triggers an imaginative reaction to the world within the text,as well as to the everyday world outside of the text.[54]

[53] Iser (1989), 239.
[54] Iser (1993), 16.

CHAPTER II

RECEPTION OF TWO PICTORIAL TEXTS IN LIGHT OF ISER'S THEORIES OF READER RESPONSE

For as far back as I can recall in my experiences of looking at works of art, I have been attracted to Netherlandish painting and to the works of Magritte. Eventually, my attraction developed into an academic investigation that, in its first form, argued for a regional cultural tradition that extended from the 15th century through the 20th century, and informed works by Robert Campin, Jan van Eyck, and Hans Memling, as well as Magritte. Response to my presentation of a paper on that topic in early 2005, and revision and peer-reviewed publication of that paper in late 2005, suggested that my ideas had potential.[55]

However, my treatment of the topic was too broad to permit a substantive discussion of the visual properties that initially attracted me—or, as I now understand, hailed me—to paintings by numerous Netherlandish artists of the 15th century and a particular Belgian artist of the 20th century. I therefore decided to focus this thesis on comparing the two exemplary pictures identified in my Introduction, so that their pictorial structure and content could be addressed in depth.

Although it is not possible to view the actual pictures side-by-side in person, a comparison of even poor-quality color reproductions reveals numerous

[55] See http://www.imageandnarrative.be/surrealism/tyson.htm

similarities in the visual structure of the paintings they represent. A fusion of horizons between the viewer and the pictorial elements of each painting makes it possible to recognize both as simulating architectural interiors. In other words, the viewer's situateadness, the viewer's horizon of experiences—and the preconceptions and/or other expectations formed along that horizon—permit the viewer to recognize each picture as that of a particular type of architectural interior. The element that instantly categorizes both pictured interiors as domestic is a bed, the sort of object that Bryson describes as one which endures "in long-lived series that cut right across divisions of national culture and historical period … ."[56]

Only a sliver of the ceiling in either room can be seen, but the amount of detail accorded to those ceilings reinforces their importance and the sense of containment that they communicate. Van der Weyden's ceiling intricately is constructed of wood. Magritte's is of whitish plaster, which would have the potential for a kind of weightless, easily overlooked neutrality, if it were not for the heavy crown molding that outlines the three visible edges of the ceiling, and for the spidery cracks that meander across both ceiling and molding. As such, the viewer is invited to receive the ceilings as worthy of consideration, and perhaps to accord them a meaning that will be utterly subjective in nature.

If nothing else, the detailed articulation of these ceilings brings the viewer's attention to what otherwise would be subordinate or peripheral pictorial elements. Yet, as Bryson also has written: in "realism, periphery counts over

[56] Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 13.

centre. … Honesty at the margins confirms faith that the image at the centre is true."[57]

Attraction of the viewer's gaze to the marginal is repeated countless times throughout each picture. Because neither picture imposes a single point around which either one must cohere or settle itself, the viewer constantly is scanning, his or her gaze constantly is unsettled and functionally indeterminate, unable to create a single, summary definition of what either painting is about. The indeterminate articulation of space and the figural content of both pictures are crucial aspects of my analysis in terms of Iser's ideas about the intersubjective play facilitated by pictorial gaps. Coupled with the truth-to-detail found in both, pictorial indeterminacy initiates a dynamic experience of both works, individually and as a pair.

Other visual elements, common to both pictures, that contribute to the indeterminacy are the intrusion of exterior views into interior space; the creation of numerous, additional interior spaces (found, for example, under and inside pieces of furniture); and the steeply slanting floors that are cut off by the bottom edge of each picture plane—thus assisting in what amounts to a visual dumping of the myriad and carefully detailed contents of each room into the foreground, where they all vie for the viewer's attention. Hollander, whose writing on Early Netherlandish pictures strongly evokes Iser's theories of reception, has written this about the treatment of floors in paintings by fifteenth-century artists: "In many Flemish paintings and in later ones derived from them, this bottom edge is an

[57] Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 60.

ambiguous barrier. It seems to be sweeping toward the viewer's own toes, attempting to scoop him up and engaged him as the scene simultaneously slides toward him."[58] Her comment easily is applied to Magritte's picture, as well.

With the boundary between pictorial spaces and viewer space compromised by various elements, including the above-noted treatments of the floor, and with compositions whose focal points cannot be pinned down, the viewer is left to freely explore each picture's surface, finding his or her own opportunities for engagement. But this kind of pictorial structuring will not attract or successfully hail every potential viewer, or create a subject of every passer by. Even Althusser conceded that interpellation can be resisted,[59] and any number of individuals will resist the offers of reception[60] extended by such indeterminate compositions as the paintings by van der Weyden and Magritte. A more coherent pictorial ordering—such as distinguishes works by painters of the Italian Renaissance—instead might create those potential subjects.

Comparing the syntax of Italian Renaissance works with those by Northern painters, Erwin Panofsky included the above-noted intrusion of exterior views into Netherlandish interiors on a list of elements that contributed to the visual incoherence of early Netherlandish pictures.[61] For Iser, however, such intrusions would operate in various ways to generate indeterminacy. They exemplify the interpenetration of elements within the text, which echoes the

[58] Hollander, 58.
[59] Gray on Althusser.
[60] Wolfgang Kemp, "The Work of Art and Its Beholder: The Methodology of the Aesthetic of Reception", *Subjects of art history: historical objects in contemporary perspectives*, ed. Mark A. Cheetham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 187.
[61] Holly quoting Panofsky, 156.

interpenetration of textual elements with elements of the empirical worlds. They provide structural elements that open up gaps in the pictures and initiate playful to-and-fro with the viewer. In other words, they contribute to incoherence and indeterminacy—but that is taken as a benefit, rather than as a detriment.

In the van der Weyden, one such intrusive view is explicit—a landscape of green hills and blue sky seen through a window that brightly pierces the room's dark, rear wall. But there is an implicit view on the right side of the painting: the window, itself, is not seen, but one of its open shutters interrupts the articulation of a bed drapery: this allows the viewer to rationalize the penetration of light from the implied window into the room's dim recesses—another kind of gap to be filled by the viewer's imagination.

In the Magritte, too, the interior and exterior views interpenetrate. One view is that of a sky—blue, and filled with puffy clouds—that has taken the place of the room's walls. As the clouds on the side walls do not seem to be subject to the same steep perspective that defines the walls' upper and lower edges, it does not appear that the sky is painted on the walls: it is as if the walls were made of some transparent material—even though the floor and ceiling are not, and even though the rear corners of the room clearly have been articulated by way of vertical lines and convincing shading.

Yet the viewer realizes that Magritte's picture of a room clearly is illuminated by a hidden window on its right side, just as is the van der Weyden. But, where the van der Weyden hints at the presence of the window via its open shutters and the light that falls through it, the Magritte reveals the window by

showing its reflection in the mirrored doors of the armoire placed against the room's rear wall, as well as by the light that falls through it. The view-revealing armoire is placed at the right side of the rear wall, whereas the rear window in the van der Weyden is placed at the left side of the rear wall. But the armoire's mirrored doors are analogous both to the rear window and to the unseen side window in the van der Weyden: not only do Magritte's mirrors reflect an actual window but they also operate as a pair of two bright, narrow, vertically oriented aperture-like rectangles.

In describing all of these features, however, I am neither insisting nor denying that they have any symbolic, edifying, or didactic meaning. I only am attempting to articulate how they compare in objective appearance from one painting to the other, and to clarify how I receive certain aspects of their appearance as interpellations. Put another way, the multiplication and interpenetration of spaces in these pictures inspires me to enter them and to create my own experience and sense of them. That sense might be summed up in terms of imaginative habitation:[62] the spaces of the pictures are real in ways that reflect and reinterpret my daily experience of private, domestic space. They engage me and invite me to imaginatively inhabit them, even as they alter my awareness of a central aspect of everyday life.

Thus, my sense of self is expanded in relation not only to the pictures, but to the empirical world. The fusion of horizons between me, as a reader or viewer, and the pictorial text facilitates the kind of active interplay needed if the text is to

[62] Gaston Bachelard, *The poetics of space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), xxxiv.

be alive for and through my experience of reading. Interpellation has created a subjectivity on my part, as well as on the text's part, but neither subjectivity is controlled by the other because the to-and-fro play of intersubjectivities endlessly is changing. Granted, Althusser recognized that ideology and hegemony are dynamic, constantly adjusting their interpellation of subjects in order to maintain control.[63] But Olin, in her essay on the gaze, wrote that many theorists "espouse some form of dialogism", in which a hegemonic gaze on the part of either part is replaced by a "mutual gaze of equality".[64] Iser belonged to that company of theorists. For me, his ideas about to-and-fro mean that neither player of the game is in a controlling position, nor does either desire to control the other or the game. Echoing Hollander's comments, Iser writes that "the text offers the reader nothing but a collection of positions which it presents in a variety of relationships, without ever formulating the focal point at which they converge."[65]

At the same time, a focal point for the text is found in the viewer's imagination—created by an act of reception and subject to continuous change by succeeding acts of reception. However, the text's lack of focal point does not mean that the text—or, here, pictures—have no intentions: according to Iser, a text's intention is to engage the reader in the above-noted, endless, possibility-expanding to-and-fro. If anything, Iser's "nothing but a collection of positions … in a variety of relationships" is a component of what Hollander has described as a "moving picture"—a picture that "invites the eye both to move into the picture and

[63] Gray on Althusser.
[64] Margaret Olin, "Gaze" in *Critical Terms for Art History*, second edition, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 327.
[65] Iser (1989), 16.

then to stay free inside it … to find its own path."[66] As the eye moves about, the individual's own feelings are tapped, leading to the projection of "the motions of our own souls into the picture to engage with the action."[67]

In respect to the moving pictures by van der Weyden and Magritte, my own projected, or receptive, experience continues with consideration of the figure objects that are situated upon their surfaces and, there, interact with other syntactic elements. I already have noted how the wardrobe in the Magritte amplifies and fragments the architecture in that painting.

The bed in the van der Weyden functions in a similar mode, becoming a virtual room within a room, a container within a container. It is placed at the picture's right and comprises a vertical element that stretches nearly from the top to the bottom of the picture plane. This bed is draped completely in red, but its curtains are opened and hang straight down: they are not depicted as bundled, as so often is the case in Netherlandish depictions of beds. The emphatically vertical, quasi-architectural curtain reinforces the sense that the bed is a virtual room which corresponds to the virtual room-within-mirrors created by Magritte's wardrobe. The resulting doubling and complication of space contributes to the instability or indeterminacy of both pictures, in much the way the outdoor views do. Still another interpenetration of space in the van der Weyden is created within the bed's draped intimacy, in the light reflected from the copper medallion suspended against the bed's back curtain.

[66] Hollander, 3-6.
[67] Hollander, 23.

Magritte's bed is not draped with side curtains, as is van der Weyden's, but its mattress is covered with carefully smoothed, dark red fabric. Furthermore, the reddish window curtain that is reflected in the mirrors of Magritte's wardrobe provides an echo of the fifteenth-century drapery. While the vertical elements of the bed in *The Annunciation* stands parallel to the right side of the picture plane, the bed in *Personal Values* is placed at the left side of the picture and is situated as parallel to the picture's top and bottom edges, as well as to the picture plane. It is an emphatically low and horizontal bed—one that, as a compositional element, enhances the subtle horizontality of Magritte's picture. Its sheets and coverlet have been snugly tucked under the mattress, and the bolsters and pillows neatly are aligned at its head.

As symbols, the beds can be construed as sites of sexual consummation. I have not read of the significance of a bed's inclusion in a painting of the Annunciation: perhaps it serves as a counterpoint to the asexual conception of Jesus, to which Mary consents after a brief time of doubt. In any case, the bed as a tradition site for sex—but also as a site of birth, and the refuge of a sick or dying person—adds a powerful dimension of intimate, private habitation to both pictures considered here.

In addition to the dialogue that takes place between bed and wardrobe, and bed and bed, the headboard of Magritte's bed corresponds with a compositional element at the left side of the van der Weyden picture—the bench pushed against the shallow hearth. Both bed and bench harbor dark, compressed spaces beneath them—peripheral spaces so fondly observed by

Bryson—as do the cabinets found in each painting. Both the bench's back and the headboard of the bed have been pushed flush to the left walls of their respective rooms, and both constitute low, dark wooden panels against which smartly plumped pillows have been placed. Magritte's pillows rest against their bolsters not unlike the heads of two serene sleepers, and are covered with pristine white shams that echo the white curtain reflected in the wardrobe's mirror. Van der Weyden's three pillows—whose sides have been punched in with animating vigor—appear to be covered in the same luxurious red fabric as the bed and its draperies.

There are numerous, other marginal elements in both pictures to consider, and for the most part they contribute to a sense of the familiar, the quotidian. But it is precisely the various homey touches in each picture that throw into relief those bizarre figures that enact the literal (in the van der Weyden) and metaphorical (in the Magritte) hailings that distill all of the more elusive little offers of reception extended by the very sorts of visual elements noted above. Iser offered frequent reminders that, in spite of familiar allusions, the world of the text is not intended to be received as the "extratextual realities"[68] of daily experience: It is a fictive analogue of the real—an "as if" of the real—and the presence within it of strange elements helps remind viewers of that fiction. At the same time, however, neither is the empirical world to be received as given—that is, determinate, immutable, beyond questioning.

According to Iser, the text refes to itself and, in doing so, encourages readers to conceive what it might "figure forth" or project into the extra-textual

[68] Iser (1993), 2.

world.[69] The text allows the extra-textual world "to be perceived from a vantage point that has never been part of it. … making conceivable what would otherwise remain hidden."[70] I receive that to mean that interpellation by and engaged reception of the text provides viewers with a critical awareness of interpellation and engagement by the world—and would apply to that sense of textual interpellation to the intentions of both van der Weyden's explicit Annunciation and Magritte's implicit Annunciation.

Again, the possibility is broached that the texts' intention is to activate viewers' creative and critical awareness of not only textual possibilities, but also of extra-textual, everyday possibilities. If this is so, I propose that viewers responding to the interpellation literally pictured in van der Weyden's painting would have understood that God's hailing of Mary was echoed in God's call to them—and that the picture could be received as a manifestation of that hailing. Thus, viewers could accept Mary's willingness to become the subject of God's salutation and the receptacle of his divine will, as a model of the willingness with which they might receive God's interpellation—by responding to "what would otherwise remain hidden". No doubt, identifying oneself as in concert with God's plan for humanity would have helped ease viewers' anxieties about life after death: it arguably also could have provided an expanded sense of the wonder in everyday, Earthly life.

The possibility that Magritte's picture enacts a comparable intention—albeit in a secular or perhaps agnostic manner—is demonstrated when we

[69] Iser (1993), 16-17.
[70] Ibid.

consider the two large, figural elements that occupy the foreground of his picture, and the analogous elements in the van der Weyden. I already have begun describing how a picture of the Biblical Annunciation could operate or perform. In van der Weyden's picturing of that event, the Archangel Gabriel is placed on the left, the Virgin Mary on the right, Gabriel positioned slightly above Mary on the picture plane. The placement of these figures suggests, in respect to Gabriel, the imminence of his appearance on the scene and, in respect to Mary, the humility of her kneeling on the floor.

The angel's urgent dynamism—the sense that his very arrival announces or identifies Mary's extraordinary subjectivity in the midst of her ordinary, everyday life—is communicated by the numerous and intricate riffling and undulations of his garments, whose rustling almost can be heard as much as seen. His magnificent mantle settles about him and the drape of his alb, simple and immaculate, suggests the movement of his legs, bending to alight on the tiled floor of Mary's room. Furthermore, the animated, diagonal of his figure contrasts with the firm vertical, set on a horizontal base, of the Virgin.

In contrast, Mary's deep blue robes drape and spread out on the floor around her, anchoring her to the spot and emphasizing her stillness. If Mary is nonplussed by this sudden invasion of privacy, or troubled by Gabriel's salutation, she scarcely shows it in van der Weyden's picture. The only signs given of her perturbation are a slight inclining of her head and the gesture of her right hand—something of a mirror reflection of Gabriel's gesture with his own left

hand. Just as van der Weyden's picture interpellates the viewer, so Gabriel hails Mary.

The Biblical Annunciation is not the overt subject of Magritte's painting, *Personal Values*. Magritte did paint a picture titled *The Annunciation* (1930). But to an even lesser extent than the present painting, it was not a visual translation of Luke's account. And yet *Personal Values* contains a figural object that is analogous to the Virgin and a figural object that is analogous to Gabriel—the blue goblet, squarely situated on the floor, near the picture's bottom edge; and the tortoiseshell comb, perched upon the bed at the picture's left edge. Both are disproportionately large in relation to the architecture and furniture of the room, as are the shaving brush atop the wardrobe and what appears to be a pink pill on the floor. But, although those latter two objects are undeniably intriguing, my concern is with the comb and goblet—and with the oversize, but otherwise ordinary, match that lies on the floor and points at the goblet. With their relative placement corresponding Gabriel's and Mary's positions, the comb and the goblet also embody attitudes comparable to those of the Angel and the Virgin.

The comb tilts backward slightly, the angle of its destabilizing diagonal close to that of the angel in van der Weyden's painting. And, like the robed figure of Gabriel, the comb creates more than one diagonal: there is that of its teeth, that of its back, and those of the edges of its shadow—one edge that is viewed through the comb's teeth, and another that falls behind its back. The edge of that rearward shadow, however, has more than one angle and each clearly is articulated: part falls against the room's left-hand wall, part against the rear wall,

part on the turned-down sheet, and part on the red coverlet. Indeed, closer inspection reveals that the shadow's edge seen through the comb's teeth also is broken into two trajectories—one that crosses the coverlet and one that rises across the back wall. These multiple angles of edges create a further visual destabilization of the already unstable comb, just as the multiple folds and furls in Gabriel's garments, and the multiple diagonals created by the edges of his mantle and alb further destabilize and animate his figure. An echo, too, of the intricate and rich embroidery of Gabriel's mantle is seen in Magritte's simulation of tortoiseshell (or perhaps faux tortoiseshell).

Situated slightly lower on the picture plane than the comb, is the blue-tinted, clear glass or crystal goblet—whose deep, straight-sided and empty bowl is supported by a sturdy stem and a broad foot that assure its stability. Much has been written about the iconography of the clear vessel found in so many Netherlandish paintings of the Annunciation—and found, sure enough, on the fireplace mantle in van der Weyden's picture—and its symbolizing the Virgin's impregnation by the Holy Spirit: the vessel/female is penetrated by light but remains intact, even as Mary's hymen remained intact.

Both van der Weyden and Magritte, then, depict their vessels or receptacles as serviceable, steady, and inviolate. Empty as it is, however, Magritte's vessel further communicates the sense that it remains to be filled—another opportunity for the viewer to fill a gap in the pictorial text.

Another common feature of Netherlandish pictures of the Annunciation is an element that moves toward or points to Mary, to indicate either the advent of

the Holy Spirit or the conception and incarnation of the Messiah. In the case of the central panel of Campin's *Merode Triptych*, a tiny infant Jesus, bearing a miniature cross, descends toward Mary's abdomen. Van der Weyden does not include such a signifier, as he is depicting the moment of Gabriel's arrival and hailing of Mary, rather than the moment of conception by spiritual overshadowing or inhabitation. But Magritte, perhaps, has directed something at his receptacle: he has painted an oversized match, whose head points toward the goblet. The match precisely parallels the bottom edge of the picture and the horizontal edges and planes of the bed, its disproportionate size calling attention to its directional function which, in turn, reinforces the position of the bed upon which the comb rests—manifesting, as such, the direction of the comb's attention or gaze toward the goblet.

My receptive description of Magritte's treatment of the comb and the rather plain goblet proposes that they—like the figures in van der Weyden's picture—announce the presence of the extraordinary in the midst of the everyday ordinary. This is consistent with Iser's statement that the text figures forth possibilities from within itself, even as it inspires the viewer to perceive new possibilities within the world of everyday experience. The comparable ways in which both van der Weyden's and Magritte's pictures are structured to operate, the ways in which they hail and engage viewers—or, at least, the present viewer—indicate to me that they have a similar intention.

Comparable intent, communicated and implemented through comparable structuring, suggests to me that the van der Weyden and the Magritte are

pictures of the same image—one that announces that humanity is not alone and helpless in the world, one that reminds individuals that the material or empirical is not determinate. My reception of this intention and this image is based on personal experience of the pictures in question and on an evolving understanding of Iser's ideas. It also is echoed in a number of scholarly texts, both historical and theoretical, which I will cite in the next chapter of my thesis.

CHAPTER III

SUPPORTING TEXTS

My thesis is based on application of reception theory to two pictures. However, in this chapter I will consider other texts that reinforce the tacit or explicit use of reception theory to analyze Early Netherlandish pictures and works by Magritte, along with some relevant, historical references.

First, I will cite my most important source in respect to Magritte—Lipinsky's dissertation, "René Magritte and Simulation: Effects Beyond His Wildest Dreams". Lipinski nowhere makes the specific comparison I am attempting, nor has she pursued the possibility of comparing any of Magritte's pictures and paintings with any by early Netherlandish artists. The closest she has come to acknowledging such a possibility is to mention in passing that other writers have done so. For example, Lipinski has noted that Dore Ashton placed Magritte "within the Flemish tradition of Van Eyck and Memling, for their transcending quietism".[71] She also has identified John Canaday as making a similar allusion: what Lipinski did not mention is that Canaday, who thought that Magritte extended the Flemish "mystical statement", also observed that Magritte invites the viewer into his work "as a participant rather than as a spectator",[72] thus implicitly referencing theory and recognizing the importance of dynamic, Iserian interaction between reader and text.

[71] Lipinski, 201-202.
[72] John Canaday, "Floating Rocks and Flaming Tubas", *Horizon* (January 1962): 78-79.

However, Lipinski persuasively has argued that Magritte intended his pictures to have an ameliorating effect upon the awareness of their viewers, and has discussed ways in which their visual structuring affords the possibility of such an effect. She has written, for example, that the dimension of mystery in Magritte's pictures "impinges upon us, making us become, making us more alert to our surroundings, making unforeseen things visible",[73] thus echoing Iser's statement about texts "making conceivable what would otherwise remain hidden".[74]

Lipinski also has stated that "Magritte's paintings function deeply, or not—depending upon one's receptivity … ."[75] But, while her ideas frequently can be read in terms of Iser's writings, Lipinski has not referred to Iser in her application of critical theory to analysis of Magritte's work. Instead, her dissertation writing relied on critical theory by Brian Massumi, and by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, when she asserted that "Magritte's goal is to affect the spectator".[76]

Lipinski has written that Magritte "was not trying to make an image of the world. Instead he sought to connect his art to the real in such a way that both are charged, painting and word."[77] Again, she did not cite Iser or reader response theory, but evoked him in terms of the interpenetration of textual world and empirical world. In Iser's view, the world of the text is an analogue for the empirical world—one that transforms a reader's or viewer's reception of the "empirical world from which the textual world has been drawn", allowing it to be

[73] Lipinski, 373.
[74] Iser (1993), 16-17.
[75] Lipinski, 250-251.
[76] Lipinski, 177.
[77] Lipinski, 326-327.

perceived “from within a vantage point that has never been a part of it”. Such points of comparison between Lipinski’s observations about Magritte and Iser’s theories of response reinforce my sense that the reception paradigm provides an important set of tools for analysis of Magritte’s work.

Lipinski’s quotation of Magritte, as communicated in his writings, also indicates the congruency of his intentions with Iser’s statements that the process of to-and-fro between reader and text is a transformative experience that would occur through the active engagement of viewer with picture. For example:

- “I hope to touch something essential to man, to what man is, to ethics rather than aesthetics.”[78]
- “ … pictorial experience … confirms my faith in the unknown possibilities of life. All these unknown things which are coming to light convince me that our happiness too depends on an enigma inseparable from man and that our duty is to try to grasp this enigma.”[79]

I have read numerous other scholarly texts about Magritte and his work, including key writings by Suzi Gablik, Jacques Meuris, Marcel Paquet, David Sylvester, and Sarah Whitfield. However, Lipinski is the only writer I know of, who rigorously has analyzed Magritte’s pictures in respect to their potential for reception. I also have researched texts by Rudi Fuchs, Willy Van den Bussche, and other late twentieth-century Belgian and Dutch scholars, which claim affinities between Magritte’s work and that by fifteenth-century Netherlandish

[78] Lipinski, 13. Reference to Magritte interview by Eleanor Kempner Freed, “Painter of Paradox”, *Houston Post*, 26 December 1965.
[79] Lipinski, 320-321. Reference to a lecture by Magritte in 1938.

painters. They are not based on any reference to reception theory: rather they make claims for regional tradition, similar to those published by Ashton and Canaday, that are not relevant to this current project.

In respect to research on Early Netherlandish paintings, I have found texts by Belting, Bryson, Holly, Craig Harbison, Marrow, and Kemp—all of which consider historical research in light of critical theory—to be most pertinent. Hollander's interpretation, and Reindert Falkenburg's more historically oriented scholarship also have been useful.

My review begins with Falkenburg's essay, "The household of the soul: conformity in the *Merode Triptych*".[80] Falkenburg has written that the Annunciation was perceived by the faithful as both the moment of Christ's incarnation and as the moment of union between Mary and her Heavenly Bridegroom, who was also her son, Jesus Christ. "The union was believed to exemplify the joyous spiritual bond with God open to every human being, given the proper preparation through prayer and meditation."[81]

The soul, site of that union, often was imagined as a house or a garden, which would need "proper preparation".[82] Therefore, Falkenburg has proposed, the Merode Triptych could have been served as a pictorial model of a properly readied soul or spiritual habitation. However, although I have admitted a strong interest in inhabitation of pictorial texts, I want to shift Falkenburg's focus slightly

[80] Reindert Falkenburg, "The household of the soul: conformity in the Merode Triptych", *Early Netherlandish painting at the crossroads: a critical look at current methodologies* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001).
[81] Falkenburg, 6.
[82] Ibid.

to question the significance of Mary's good housekeeping in a picture that manifests both readiness and interpellation.

If Mary is ready for the advent of her Bridegroom, then she already has identified herself as one who desires unity with God. Yet the Biblical narrative—which the layperson in fifteenth-century Flanders would have known through public liturgy and through private readings from a personal Book of Hours[83]--states that Mary did not immediately recognize herself as the subject identified by Gabriel's hailing. Troubled, she initially responds with a statement of confusion. Thus, Mary is not entirely ready for the kind of unity that is offered to her. This complication of the reading suggests that the picture does more than model preparation of the soul: it indicates an interpellation, prior to the potential subject's reception of subjectivity. Mary is predisposed to receive, but she has not yet exercised her agency and made her decision.

However, in Luke 1:38, Mary ultimately responds to the angel by saying: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." Mary, as an agent, has decided to receive the subjectivity the angel announced and offered to her. Having received God's word, or text, she will engage with it in an intersubjective relationship.

The *Merode Triptych* also has been addressed by Holly, whose interest was not in the picture's historical function, but in using it as an example of how the intentions of a text exceed the intentions of its author. She also has looked to it for new insights into iconology, the interpretive program that under Panofsky

[83] Beth Williamson, "Liturgical Image or Devotional Image? The London Madonna of the Firescreen", *Objects, Images, and the Word: Art in the Service of the Liturgy*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 299.

became so influential during the mid-twentieth century.[84] Indeed, Holly has considered the *Merode Triptych* as a "painted metaphor for the process of interpretation itself" in respect to its to-and-fro-ness, the element of play".[85]

Interpretation, then, not interpellation is the focus of Holly's essay. Nonetheless, Holly's initial reference is to interpellation as invoked by W.J.T. Mitchell, who observed the way that Las Meninas, painted by Diego Velázquez, "greets or hails or addresses us, that it takes the beholder into the game". [86] However, for Holly, interpellation and reception theory have led to a focus on the instances of gazing in all three of the work's panels—gazing by the picture's patron, by his wife, and by the man in the garden, among others. Invoking Iser, Holly has asserted her own reading as a "metaphorical way of coming to terms with the proliferation of scholarship surrounding the Merode Altarpiece".[87] The cues from which she takes her reading "lurk within the rhetorical strategies of the pictorial composition".[88] For Holly, the interaction of the structural and figural content of the triptych's vignettes serves to model the act of reading, itself, and anticipates the readings of it and writings about it produced by generations of scholars.[89]

As already noted, Hollander has written about early Netherlandish painting in terms that resonate with Iser's and Holly's observations about the intentionality of texts; about indeterminacy in texts; and about various ways in which texts

[84] Holly, 151.
[85] Holly, 156-157.
[86] Holly, 149.
[87] Holly, 162.
[88] Holly, 163.
[89] Holly, 168.

inspire and participate in play. She has written, for example, about the seemingly unedited effects of light, which contribute to an indeterminate effect that "suggests the idea of subjectivity—the unique soul under God's eye, the unique objects under the light. To look is to be personally engaged … ."[90] Put another way, the indeterminate, seemingly unmediated organization of the picture suggests that it is "as if the artist had left the meaning to be provided by the viewer".[91]

Hollander's conclusion was that the effects of such representation are even stronger "when the subject matter inside the frame is familiar and conventional".[92] This relates to Iser's references to the manipulation of the familiar: when the familiar is made strange, Iser considered it a key element of the form of play he called *alea*. Iser wrote: "*Alea* is a pattern of play [whose] … basic thrust is defamiliarization", which strips textual elements of their original meaning and, as noted above, contributes to the text's existence as an analogue of the empirical world.[93] The effect of defamiliarization is intensified about realistic surface details that clamor for the eye's attention.[94]

Like Hollander, Harbison has been struck by Early Netherlandish artists' defamiliarization of the everyday and, as such, their introduction of the spiritual into the material and the domestic.[95] Again, these observations are congruent with Iser's writings about the text's selective references to the empirical world; its

[90] Hollander, 53-54.
[91] Hollander, 17.
[92] Hollander, 21.
[93] Iser (1989), 112.
[94] Hollander, 53.
[95] Harbison (1985), 112.

effecting our awareness of the empirical world as an analogue of itself, and its thus revealing "what has remained concealed" in that very world.

Bryson, too, has stated that bringing focus to things that perception normally overlooks results in a defamiliarization that, in turn, confers on those humble things "a dramatic objecthood, but the intensity of the perception at work makes for such an excess of brilliance and focus that the image and its objects seem not quite of this world … ."[96] This prompts me to suggest that here is an incisive insight into Magritte's surrealism, as well as the keen focus that van der Weyden brought to bear on all aspects of his picture.

Of the sources that I have consulted, Kemp is distinguished by his explicit engagement with reception theory—specifically with that aspect that he has called "reception aesthetics".[97] As such, Kemp's ideas sometimes supplement and other times diverge from Iser's, even as they also overlap with ideas asserted by the other scholars noted above. For example, Kemp has taken account of the profusion of detail, the fragmentation of space, and other indeterminate elements in Early Netherlandish pictures, and has recognized them as structured strategies for engaging the viewer in an intersubjective relationship.[98]

According to Kemp, the primary task of interpreting a picture according to reception aesthetics "starts at the point of intersection between 'context' and 'text'".[99] For Iser, this point of intersection would be the site of play between text

[96] Bryson (1990), 87-88.
[97] Kemp, 181.
[98] Kemp, 188.
[99] Kemp, 186-187.

and reader (and reader's preconceptions). Kemp has used different terms, but his ideas are consistent with Iser's. As indicated, Kemp has asserted that the text is structured such that it extends what he has called "offers of reception",[100] a term that I already have used interchangeably with "hailing", "salutation", and "interpellation". What seems particularly helpful about substituting "offer of reception" for any of those others, is that is more explicitly recognizes the encounter between text and reader as one of potentially egalitarian, mutual engagement. Kemp has made explicit his understanding of agency on the part of both picture and viewer, or "beholder", to use Kemp's terminology.[101] Ach approaches and interpellates or hails the other. In effect, each becomes a subject of the other—a claim that may be even more germane to Magritte's pictures than it is to historical works.

Marrow is another important source for this project, as indicated in the Introduction. Although he is a historian, Marrow frequently has addressed Early Netherlandish pictures in terms that are remarkably congruent with Iserian theory in content and language—even though he has made no reference to either response theory or Iser. For example, in regard to miniatures painted by Hand G, whom Marrow tentatively has identified as van Eyck, Marrow noted that "conspicuous gaps and absences in the miniatures" lead viewers to "a new type of interaction with the images, one that invites them to supply what is not seen from their own knowledge of the inhabited world … ."[102]

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[100] Ibid.
[101] Kemp, 181
[102] Marrow (1998), 8.

Marrow's references to the engagement of viewer consciousness—the invitation to move beyond the simple empathic responses that Netherlandish devotional paintings commonly are described as programmed to solicit—are remarkable.[103] It is easy to understand the responses that typically were expected to pictures, for example, of Christ's Passion, in Althusserian terms. Marrow has noted that many such pictures "insist upon articulating both the cause and the desired effects of the viewer's responses."[104]

Despite such examples of ideological manipulation, Marrow has identified the development of a "new sense of the meaning of a work of art, one in which artists call into play the role of the spectator in constituting art's meaning" as a major interest in art of the period, one explored by almost all of the dominant artists in Northern Europe.[105] Again, Marrow has echoed certain of Iser's claims, in ways that allow me to apply them to the Magritte as much as to the van der Weyden.

[103] Marrow (1986), 154-155.
[104] Marrow (1986), 157.
[105] Marrow (1986), 169.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In the beginning, I understood that the pictures I have described here, hailed or interpellated me or, as Kemp would say, extended to me offers of reception. However, as I have gone through the process of analyzing my reception of those offers, I have realized that I am interpellation van der Weyden's *Annunciation* and Magritte's *Personal Values* as much as I continue to respond to their saluations. It has become an intersubjective relationship or to-and-fro play that began when each announced that it had identified me as a subject, a willing receptacle, for its structured intentionality. What continues to result from this dialogic exchange is a continuous freshening of the pictures, singularly and comparatively, and a continual refreshing of my consciousness of the possibilities of everyday life.

It is because of the comparable intentions of these two pictures, as articulated through their visible structural similarities, that I receive them both as manifestations of the Annunciation. I would not have been able to recognize and articulate the link between structure and pictorial (or textual) intention, however, without the linkages established by Iserian theory.

At the same time, I have to wonder if it is possible that the van der Weyden and the Magritte have been engaged in their own, intersubjective

relationship—one that was initiated by Magritte having been interpellated by a picture of the Annunciation, perhaps even by van der Weyden's painting in the Louvre? Is it possible, then, that each has come to extend to the other an offer of reception, and that each identifies the other as an Annunciation?

If that is so, then van der Weyden's literal visualization of Luke's account not only provides a basis for receiving the Magritte as a metaphorical Annunciation: it must be likewise that Magritte's picture—with its overt estrangement of the familiar—reveals the van der Weyden's real fictive strangeness; the radicalism of the Annunciation that takes place within the pictorial text; and the dynamism of the salutation that the text extends outward to the viewer. In other words, *Personal Values* interpellates the *Annunciation* as a Magritte.

In a way, the lack of historical documentation for this proposal makes it all the more exciting and gratifying as a theory. Only within reception theory could all of these offers of reception, all of these—and more, over time—instances of to-and-fro have been articulated. The process and results of applying reception theory validate its employment as a methodology.

Would my thesis have been more persuasive if I had undertaken primary research and found a piece of paper that concretely linked Magritte's picture to the artist's interpellation by the van der Weyden?

Waniek has written that "we are not liable to compare two things arbitrarily". He has recognized that intuition can apprehend hidden and even unique relationships between art works "no matter how distant they seem in our

accepted classification".[106] I hope that such conviction, supported by Iser's theories of reader response, renders the need for historical documentation redundant—for the present—and that my analysis of the visual evidence presented by the two texts in question is sufficient for readers to receive the thesis proposed or offered here.

[106] Waniek, 137.

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